

Study 7 – What is the Meaning of History?

I. Views of the Meaning of History

A. Non-Christian Views of History

1. Both ancient and modern (including post-modern) thought, though differing in details, typically share a common view of history—it is basically meaningless (NOTE: this is not necessarily true of false religions—Islam for instance). Such views do not necessarily rule out the existence of something beyond this world.
2. Greek, “cyclic” view of history—history is made of endless repeated cycles. Events recur again and again, thus there is no significant meaning to any particular event in human history. Man’s only real hope is that the ‘gods’ intervene and deliver man into the great Beyond.
3. Eastern religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism and New Age thinking, also basically view human history as meaningless—ultimately illusory—finding ‘hope’ and meaning through reaching a final, non-material state.
4. Modern and post-modern views, which are typically atheistic and evolutionary, either view history as a meaningless succession of unrelated events resulting from chance and with no movements toward a goal, or may see history as a sequence of events determined by the forces of nature (Darwinism) or human economic systems (Marxism), which gradually result in progress.

B. The Christian View of History

1. Christianity teaches that history does have meaning and is the working out of God’s purposes according to His decrees and moving toward a pre-established goal, with God’s unfolding purpose of redemption in Jesus Christ at the very center of all history.
2. “Christianity maintains that history has meaning and purpose in opposition to all views of man that suggest that it is without these.”¹

II. Elements of a Christian View of History

A. There are four pivotal historical events that are critical to a Biblical worldview. Look up the verses below and write in the blank a word or phrase that identifies these events.

1. _____ Genesis 1:1; Psalm 33:6,9.
2. _____ Genesis 3:6-8, 13.

¹ Morton Smith, *Systematic Theology* (Greenville: Greenville Seminary Press, 1994), p. 738.

3. _____ Hebrews 9:12; Ephesians 1:7.
 4. _____ Romans 8:18-23; Revelation 21:1-4.
- B. God's decree—His eternal purpose, according to His own wise but secret will, that is behind everything that happens—the events of history.
1. Read Isaiah 14:24 and Ephesians 1:11-12. What do these verses tell us about why things happen as they do?

 3. Read Acts 4:24-28. How does the death of the Lord Jesus Christ fit into God's purpose?

 4. Read Daniel 4:35. Can anyone or anything stop God from doing what He wants in history?

 5. Read Romans 11:36 and Revelation 4:11. What is the ultimate reason for history? How does this reason give meaning and purpose to history?

 6. Read 1 Corinthians 10:31. What ultimate purpose is man to pursue in life?

- C. Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Meaning for Man in History.
1. Read Genesis 1:26-31 and Psalm 8:3-8. What do these verses tell us of man's purpose and place in history?

 2. Read Genesis 6:5, Psalm 14:1 and Romans 5:12. How did the Fall change man's view of the world and his ability to function as God intended?

 4. Read Romans 8:18-24. Toward what end is all history moving? What practical effect does this knowledge have for the believer?

- D. Christ the Center of and Lord of History.
1. Read Ephesians 1:18-23. How do these verses show that Christ is the center and Lord of history?

2. Read Colossians 1:15-10. How do these verses show that Christ is the center and Lord of history?
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E. Uniformitarianism and Catastrophism. Naturalism, a common view in the West, sees the events of history as following the laws of nature that have always existed, following a uniform pattern and sequence. Such views deny the existence of a Sovereign God Who freely acts in history, sometimes sending catastrophic events (like the Flood of Noah) or miraculous events (Christ’s many miracles; His resurrection from the dead) to interrupt the apparent uniformitarianism predicted by the Naturalists, and will end this phase of human history with the ‘catastrophe’ of the final judgment.

1. Read 2 Peter 3:3-4. What sort of people does Peter predict will come in the last days? (NOTE: The “last days” here refer to the days between Jesus’ first and second comings).
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2. Read 2 Peter 3:3-4. What view of history will these people have? How does this relate to naturalism?
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4. Read 2 Peter 3:5-7. How does the apostle Peter refute these people?
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F. The End and the New Beginning

1. Read 2 Peter 3:10. What does Peter say will happen to world as we know it?
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2. Read 2 Peter 3:11-13. How should these coming events affect our lives?
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3. Read Revelation 21:1-4, 21:9-22:5. List ten things John tells us about the new heavens and the new earth:

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

(5) _____

(6) _____

(7) _____

(8) _____

(9) _____

(10) _____